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EXTENSION OF SUFFRAGE.

A PLAN

FOR

EXTENDING

THE

RIGHT OF VOTING

FOR

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,

UPON THE

PRINCIPLE

OF

RENTAL ASSESSMENT:

EXAMINATION OF THE LIMITS OF SIR ROBERT PEEL'S JURY
BILL—MINIMUM OF ASSESSMENT—ITS PROBABLE EFFECTS
IN LIVERPOOL—PRESENT INJURIOUS PRACTICE OF ASSESS-
MENT UNCONTROLLED BY LAW—NECESSITY FOR ITS BEING
LEGALLY EQUALISED—SAFETY AND ADVANTAGE OF THE
PLAN.

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PLAN FOR EXTENDING THE RIGHT OF VOTING, &c.

As the spirit of improvement is now energetically, and beneficially, pervading the public institutions of the country, particularly its parliamentary representation, the foundation of which is the right of voting for its members, it becomes a business of the first importance to invite attention to some plan, which, although it may not satisfy those who prefer universal suffrage, nor those who desire a limitation, which would exclude several important classes of society, may, when examined and adjusted, lead to unanimity in the principle of the great and salutary measure, and ensure its success.

The main object with those who are sincere friends to social order, and good government, should be, to yield so much of the detail on either side as will not sacrifice the important principle, which is the first consideration. That principle is—an extension of the elective franchise.

SIR ROBERT PEEL'S JURY BILL, 6 GEO. IV, Chap. 50.

An opinion has very generally prevailed in favour of extending the franchise to all persons who are liable to serve under Mr. Peel's jury bill, which, in England, includes "all men, being natural-born subjects of the king, between the ages of 21 and 60, who have a clear income of £10 per annum, in lands or tenements, or both, of freehold, copyhold, or customary tenure; and every such man who has a clear income of £20 per annum, in lands or tenements,

under lease for 21 years, or more; and also every such man who is a householder, assessed to the poor rate or inhabited house duty, on a value of not less than £30 per annum in the county of Middlesex, nor less than £20 per annum in any other county; or, who occupies a house containing not less than fifteen windows."

The qualification of every such man residing in any county *in Wales*, is to the extent of *three-fifths* of any of the foregoing qualifications.

Peers—judges—clergymen—priests and ministers duly licensed—sergeants at law—barristers—doctors of civil law—attorneys—solicitors—proctors—officers of the courts, of law, equity, admiralty, and ecclesiastical—coroners—gaolers—physicians—surgeons—apothecaries certificated—officers of the navy or army in full pay—officers of the customs and excise—sheriffs' officers—high constables—parish clerks and those who are exempt by prescription, charter, grant, or writ—justices of the peace—and all men of the age of 60 and upwards—being excepted from serving on juries upon the basis of this bill, would also be excluded from the right of voting.

The number of persons within the borough of Liverpool, which is co-extensive with the parish, to whom the franchise would thus be extended, is, by the parish jury list in August last, only 2340; although the number of assessments on tenements is, 2500 warehouses, counting-houses, offices, yards, &c., and 25,200 dwelling-houses; total, 27,700.

Considerable surprise has been excited at finding no more than 2340 persons eligible to vote on this basis; and that, included in that number, there are only 80 freemen who are resident tenants of houses of £20 per annum or upwards, estimating the number of freemen at 5400.

'The freedom of the borough is obtained by birth, or seven years' servitude, to a freeman within the town. The largest number heretofore polled on one occasion, was in an arduous contest for the mayoralty in 1827—3545. On the recent occasion (November, 1830,) of the most spirited contest for a member of the borough ever known, after a most active, searching, and extended canvass for upwards of six weeks, and an energetic poll of seven days, during which, an intense influence was exerted, and money most profusely lavished, the number polled, including out-voters, was 4401.

	Mr. Denison.	Mr. Ewart.	Total.	Gross Poll.
1st day	260	248	508	508
2d „ . . .	320	320	640	1148
3d „	350	350	700	1848
4th „	390	390	780	2628
5th „	380	380	760	3388
6th „	320	320	640	4028
7th „	166	207	373	4401
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	2186	2215	4401	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	

Majority.. 29

The population of the borough, by the census in 1801, was 77,653, (houses, 11,784,)—in 1811 it was 94,376, (houses, 16,152,) being an increase of $21\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. In 1821 it was 118,972, (houses, 20,339,) being an increase of 26 per cent. upon 1821.

Therefore, estimating the subsequent increase at only 20 per cent. upon 1821, the present population, at the same proportions, may be taken at 64,000 males, 76,000 females, total 140,000 (houses, 25,200). The census in 1821 gave 25,811 males, aged 20 and upwards; so that taking 21 as the minimum of age for an adult, and adding a proportionate increase, the number of adult males may now be taken at 30,000.

The following statement will exemplify the assumed increase:—

COUNTY OF LANCASTER.

Years.	Houses.	POPULATION.			Increase per cent.
		Male.	Female.	Total.	
1801..	117,664	322,356	350,375	672,731	
1811..	149,359	394,104	434,205	828,309	23
1821..	183,943	512,476	540,383	1,052,859	27

BOROUGH OF LIVERPOOL.

1801..	11,784	34,367	43,286	77,653	
1811..	16,152	41,296	53,080	94,376	21½
1821..	20,339	54,340	64,632	118,972	26
1830 } Estimated	25,200	64,000	76,000	140,000	20

Thus, there would be only 2340 persons eligible to vote, out of 30,000 adult males, in a population of 140,000 people, having 27,700 assessments, probably producing a rental of £700,000 per annum—the assessment in 1828 on 26,230 assessments being for the parish rates £535,911, and for the county rates £751,126—A result which shews the injustice of forming the constituency upon such a narrow principle.

A similar result would, no doubt, be found in most large towns; but in others, and in smaller ones where the rental value is lower, and particularly in villages and agricultural districts, the deficiency of the produce on this principle would be so strikingly manifest, as to confirm the necessity of forming the suffrage on a more extended basis than that offered by Sir R. Peel's jury bill.

THE PLAN.

The plan which it is the object of these pages to submit, is founded upon the principle, that every man, who by rental assessment contributes to the maintenance of the state, of which contribution the poor rates form a very important part, should have a vote in the election of the members for the borough or county in which he is so assessed.

The proposition which is therefore submitted, is, that in addition to those who have now the privilege of voting, or who may hereafter acquire it upon the same principle, except those who may be or become entitled to it by assessment, every man in England and Wales, being a natural-born subject of the king, who shall be rated in the parish books upon one or more assessments each being not less than £ per annum, and shall have paid the government assessment and the poor rates, or the poor rates only, which have been demanded for the premises so assessed upon him for the year (ending at the usual period to which those taxes or rates are annually made up) immediately preceding the day of election, such payment being made at least days before that day, shall be entitled to give his vote in person, but not otherwise, for the members of the borough in which he is so rated; and in case he is assessed in a place which does not send any member to parliament, he shall be entitled to a vote for the members of the county in which he is so rated and charged. In cases of partnership, each partner in the firm assessed, to have a vote, provided his partnership proportion of the joint assessment be not less than the sum abovementioned. No man to be entitled to more than one vote by virtue of any number of assessments in any borough or county, nor to a vote for the county in which he is so entitled to a vote for a borough, although he is assessed in more than one parish in the county.

The exception, that no man who is assessed according to the basis of this proposition, although he may otherwise have the privilege of voting, shall be entitled to vote until he has paid the rates so assessed upon him, is submitted under the impression, that in common justice, the privilege which is not acquired by assessment, ought not to be enhanced by an extension of credit, which is denied to others, and which, by delay, might lead to the loss, or other (possibly sinister) exoneration from the payment of rates. One view of the proposition in not rescinding the privilege of voting upon the existing principles is, not to exclude a proportion of the industrious classes who may upon those principles, be entitled to vote, but not be assessed to obtain it.

The principle of requiring the payment of rates, as the passport to a vote, is established by act 58, Geo. III. chap. 69, for regulating parish vestries, by which it is enacted, that no person shall be entitled to vote, or to be present, in any parish vestry meeting, until he shall have paid the rates which shall be due from and have been demanded of him.

If the assessment and payment of the assessed *house duty* were made the criterion, and the minimum was fixed to be a rental value of £10, as the lowest basis of a vote, it would exclude a large portion of intelligent men, particularly in small towns and country places:—

and as all farm houses, of whatever rent, occupied by *tenants* for the purpose of husbandry only ;
and all farm houses occupied by the *owners*, and *bona fide* used for the purposes of husbandry only, which, with the household and other offices are valued under the act at not more than £10 per annum
are exempt from the house duty, a very large portion of

yeomen and farming tenantry, highly respectable as they are, would also be excluded from the right of voting if it were made to depend upon the basis of the house duty.

Another very respectable class, who are not housekeepers, yet are the tenants of warehouses, factories, and other valuable premises and tenements used for commercial and manufacturing purposes, and shops—which are not assessable to the house duty, would also be excluded, although they contribute largely to the poor rates.

Therefore, as the assessment to the poor rate, includes the property that contributes to the assessed house duty, and comprises all other tangible property, it appears, that to extend the right of voting to those who pay the poor rates, will be comprehensive and equitable.

Whether any of the classes which are exempted from serving on juries, or any others, should be excluded from the right of voting for members of parliament, is a question which demands serious deliberation.

THE MINIMUM OF ASSESSMENT.

In order to assist in forming an opinion as to a minimum of assessments, it may be useful to state, that in Liverpool the poor rates have not hitherto been obtained from any houses of £10 per ann. and under, of which there are about 16200; and, it may be added, that only a very small portion has been received from houses of £15 per annum, and but a small proportion of those assessed even at or under £20 per annum. It has been estimated that the rental of premises of these descriptions amounts to £220,000, from which, only an inconsiderable part of the poor rate

can be collected under the existing laws, yet the whole is charged to the county rates, which, being payable out of the poor rates, is levied upon the rate payers. The rental of the property thus virtually exempt is, no doubt, benefitted by such exemption, although that property furnishes so large a portion of those who require parochial relief. It may therefore be confidently stated, that the tenants of houses of £10 per annum and under, are virtually exempt from poor rates.

Under the government house duty assessment, all inhabited houses, which, with the household and other offices, yards, and gardens therewith occupied, are not of the full annual value of £10 and upwards, are not brought into charge.

So also the law, by which a person may obtain a parochial settlement, by renting a tenement in England or Wales, requires, that the tenement shall be of the annual value of ten pounds at the least, and be hired by the year, be occupied for that period, and the rent for the same to the amount of ten pounds be actually paid.

These authorities, therefore, seem to be in favour of the minimum of £10 per annum; and, as far as Liverpool is concerned, and in other towns also where rents are of equal or superior value, a rent or value of £10 would probably be sufficiently low. But when it is seen, that that minimum would exclude an equally, if not (in reference to property) a more respectable class of persons in small towns; and in the country, particularly in agricultural districts, where the rental value is lower,—and when it is also seen that the jury bill reduces the qualification from £20 in England to £15 in Wales,—the subject seems to demand a further consideration of the minimum, in reference to that respectable class of persons.

PROBABLE EFFECT OF THE MINIMUM IN LIVERPOOL.

As a proposition to extend the right of voting in Liverpool to a rental value of £10 per annum might, at first sight, appear to descend too low in the scale, it may be useful to refer to some data whereon to form some opinion as to its probable effect. It is understood that the number of assessments is 27,700, (including 2500 warehouses, offices, yards, &c.) and estimating, according to the latest mode of assessment, the total number of assessments of the value of £10 and upwards, (allowing 600 for cases of several assessments to one person) at..... 12,000

AND MAKING DEDUCTIONS

For empty tenements.....
 For partial occupation, (the proposition requiring)
 the voter to occupy the same tenement for the }
 whole year) }
 For females assessed
 For freemen assessed, who would, unless excepted, }
 be otherwise entitled to vote }
 For absentees
 For sick persons, who would be unable to vote
 For defaulters in payment of the year's taxes }
 and rates, from disability, disinclination, }
 or negligence }
 the number of voters under this proposition would probably
 fluctuate between 6000 and 8000.

THE RESULT WOULD THEN BE

Population, Male 64,000 } 140,000
 Female 76,000 }
 Male adults 21 years of age and upwards 30,000
 Number of assessments 27,700
 Rental £700,000
 No. of assessments, £10 per annum and upwards.. 12,600
 Number of persons likely to vote upon)
 assessments of £10 per annum and } from 6000 to 8000
 upwards }
 Number of persons eligible to vote, under Mr. }
 Peel's bill, as being liable to serve on juries } 2340
 Number of freemen polled, out of 5400..... 4400

If the proposition were confined to house-holders only, of which, there are about 10,000, the number of voters, according to the above data, would probably fluctuate between 5000 and 6000.

The statements which have now been submitted lead to the conclusion, that to restrict the right of voting to the principle of Sir Robert Peel's jury bill, which is limited to assessments of houses of not less than £20 per annum, if carried to its utmost practicable extent, without any of the exceptions in that bill, would not only be wholly inadequate to effect any salutary correction of the evils of bribery and corruption, but would cause great and general disappointment and dissatisfaction.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ASSESSMENT.

Whatever amount may be established as the minimum of assessment, it will no doubt appear to be indispensably necessary, to guard it by an obligation, mentally and pecuniarily binding, upon the officers who have to take the assessment, that they shall take it upon a general and uniform principle.

That principle appears to be well and equitably defined by the act 55, Geo. III. chap. 51, under which the county rates are levied, to be the full and fair annual value, without any deduction, allowance, or abatement whatsoever.

The same principle is established by the laws and regulations which govern the officers of his Majesty's revenue, who are thereby bound to assess for the house duty at the full annual value.

But overseers of the poor are not bound by any law to take their assessments upon any given principle of value. They are, it is true, bound to levy the rates by an equal pound rate; but they are entirely left to exercise their own ingenuity, caprice, or discretion, as to the rental value or portion thereof, at which they may assess any man's property, or a whole parish. It is, consequently, idle to talk of an equal pound rate, if the property upon which the rate is levied, is liable to be unequally and capriciously valued. Therefore, if they, from any motive, can value one man's property higher or lower than another's; or, as in the case of parishes, may assess either the full value, or one-fifth, one-half, two-thirds, three-fourths, or any portion they may think fit, of the full rent or value, they possess a dangerous power which may inflict private and public injury and injustice.

It was this power, under which Liverpool for many years (viz. from 1816 to 1828) paid an unjust portion of the county rate, other parishes in the county not being valued upon an equal principle.

Among the many charges brought against metropolitan self-elected select vestries, not under the *general* select vestry act 59 Geo. III. chap. 12, the most prominent and important is, that of irregular, negligent, capricious, and partial assessments: and it is stated, that in one parish "many of the *non-select* are assessed, for premises which, *ad valorem*, are not worth £20 per annum, at a sum double that amount; while many of the *select*, who hold premises of ten times the value and extent of those before mentioned, are rated at sums not exceeding £30 or £40." Another was "rated at £40 a year on premises which cost him £700 to £800, while others were only rated at £32 for extensive concerns valued at £8000. The next was a brewery, in which a

number of its improvements alone could not have cost less than from £200,000 to £300,000 ; yet this immense concern was rated at the comparatively miserable sum of £1000."

This subject was also lately noticed in the House of Commons, when a petition was presented from the parish of St. James, Westminster, complaining of great irregularities in the mode of assessment in that parish.

In further proof of the *power* being *absolute*, it may be stated that the mode of assessment in Liverpool was generally on the full rent, with occasionally a trifling deduction, until 1817, when it was taken upon the full rent or rental value, and the rate was then 3s. 6d. in the pound. In 1818 one-third was deducted from the rental value, but the rate was raised to 7s. 4d. in the pound : this deduction continued three years. Subsequently, for some years, it was taken upon the full value ; and, more recently, it has been taken at nine-tenths.

The assessment in Leeds lately caused much agitation there among the rate payers, those who paid large sums, and who were entitled to six votes, being deprived of five votes, because the overseers chose to take the assessment upon *one-fifth* of the rental. To this, the parish officers reply that they "have not the slightest objection to a law, by which all property in all townships in the kingdom shall be assessed to the rack rent, as nearly as can be ascertained." The rate payers ask, "has the legislature ever enacted a law, by which property is to be assessed, at *ONE-FIFTH* of the rack rent ? Is this the practice in the collection of the assessed taxes ? Was it so in the property tax ? And does the vestry act 58 Geo. III. chap. 59, giving six votes to a person who pays upon a rental of £150 per ann. leave parish officers a power to nullify all its provisions, for the due representation of property, by the legerdemain of making £150 represent only £30 ? Impossible !"

The clamour which has recently been made by some of the metropolitan parishes against the charge for the new police, has been stated to arise, in a main degree, from the difference—between the value of the assessments upon which the police rate is charged, which is understood to be the full annual value as professedly assessed for the county rate,—and the assessments for parish purposes, which are said to be in great variety of proportions of the full value, viz. two-thirds, one-half, &c.;—so that a police rate of 8d. in the pound, is magnified into a parish rate of 12d. or 16d. in the pound. So also in Leeds (as before mentioned) a rate of 3s. in the pound on the full value, is, by the *leger-demain*, as it is there called, of the overseers, in assessing at one-fifth, magnified into a rate of fifteen shillings in the pound!!!

And it appears, by a late publication,* that in 1803, when parliament, by an act, required to know the proportion which the rated rental bore to the rack rent, there were only four counties, 810 parishes, in which the rate was, generally, on the rack rental; 17 counties, 4390 parishes, in which the rated rental might, upon the average of *counties*, be taken at all varieties, from one-third up to three-fourths; and probably a much greater variety would be seen if each parish were particularized; and that from 31 counties, 9440 parishes, no satisfactory information could be obtained as to the mode of assessment.

It seems, that in these cases, notwithstanding their importance, the parishioners are left completely at the mercy of the overseers, who may raise, or lower, the assessment, or the rate, or both, as it may suit their ideas, predilections, or caprice, without being liable to be called to account for

* On the equity and necessity of equalizing and regulating Parochial Assessments and Parochial Accounts, published by Baldwin and Co. Paternoster-row, London, and Thomas Kaye, Castle-street, Liverpool. Price 2s. 6d.

their partiality. It is true, the parties aggrieved may appeal, but it is also as truly stated, that that process is so vexatious, dilatory, and expensive, that, to a man in business, the remedy may be worse than the evil.

It may here be inquired, why overseers of the poor are allowed such a latitude of discretion, when all other branches of taxation, and national revenue, are placed under regulations and restraint? Are they so superior to other men in intellect and judgment, and so much less liable to be actuated by the feelings of interest, caprice, or prejudice, that the valuation of every man's tenement and premises is to be left to their *discretion*, whether the assessment is to be the rack rent, or the estimated value, or three-fourths, two-thirds, one-half, or one-fifth of the rental? Common justice requires that the public, individually and collectively, should be protected against the possible consequences of such an arbitrary discretion.

THE NECESSITY AND BENEFIT OF LEGALISING A GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF ASSESSMENT.

The discretionary power of levying such a rate in the pound, as may be required for parochial purposes, may safely remain with the overseers. But, when the injustice which exists, in allowing that power to pervade and detort assessments—to the poor rates—church rates—land tax—watching—lighting—highway—paving—sewerage—and other local rates—police rates—the right of voting in parish vestries—and the right of voting for members of parliament upon the basis of rental assessment, is brought under the notice of his Majesty's Ministers, it may be confidently expected, that they will, without delay, by a special act of parliament, legalise an equal principle of assessment, for the government of those officers throughout *England* and *Wales*.

That principle, properly guarded, will not only prevent private injury, but will benefit the community at large, by a more equal and impartial distribution of the assessments and rates, under which, above seven millions five hundred thousand pounds is annually raised as poor rates only ; but, including the other rates, would probably exceed ten millions per annum, levied without any legal controlling principle to govern the valuation.

SAFETY AND ADVANTAGE OF THE PLAN.

As the right of voting, under the plan proposed, will be extended only to those who have paid the rates for the year, it will of course require a residence or occupation of at least that period, before the privilege is obtained ; and this will exclude the probability of any persons intruding themselves transiently, or of making any transient payment to acquire a vote.

The residence or occupation, and payment of rates, will also preserve the comparative respectability of the voters ; and the privilege of voting, perhaps, ought not to be withheld from him who thus contributes to the maintenance of the state, because, the contribution of the man who, with his limited means, contributes upon an assessment even under £10 per annum, (and in small towns, and in the country, premises of that rent are superior to a similar rent in large towns,) is, in degree, equal to those who contribute a much larger amount.

One of the advantages of this proposition is, that it will give to the individual who pays the taxes or rates, feelings of importance and satisfaction, at having a vote in the choice of those, to whom are confided, the power of consent-

ing to his being taxed. Those feelings will operate, not only to abate the cause of the discontent he now reasonably entertains, at not possessing that right to which he is justly entitled, but also to induce him to contribute his quota with comparative cheerfulness, under the assurance, that, in accordance with the true spirit of our glorious constitution, he is not taxed without being represented.

Another advantage will be, that if the great object of giving his vote, stimulates a man to pay, or in some other way leads to the payment of his taxes and rates, that payment will be nationally and locally beneficial—nationally, in reference to public taxation—and locally, in reference to the poor rates—by increasing the funds of the national, and the parochial treasury.

The writer is not aware that a similar proposition has been promulgated: his object in submitting it, which he does with the utmost deference, is, to promote unanimity, by attracting attention to the support of a defined and equitable principle, upon which the elective franchise may be safely and advantageously extended.

This extension is of paramount importance:—it is the only means to abate, if not destroy, the nefarious system of bribery and corruption, which has too long been suffered to prevail, which destroys integrity, debases those who are its victims, and demoralizes the population; a system which has recently been in full and shameless activity, and which can only be corrected, by a liberal and equitable distribution of the right of voting.

Liverpool, December, 1830.



